

Plastics are polluting

OUR OCEANS

The world population produces about **280 million tons** of plastic waste every year, and this amount continues to increase.



Much of this plastic waste escapes recycling, landfill or combustion processes and **ends up in the ocean.**

Once in the ocean, some of this plastic waste will end up on the shore, some heavy pieces will sink and others will drift out to the open sea.



However, there are tiny particles called **microplastics** (less than 5mm) rapidly accumulating in the world's oceans. They are a topic of global concern.

Microplastics come from the manufacturing or waste processing of larger pieces of plastic, but they also come from personal-care products such as toothpaste and beauty scrubs. **These particles are also known as microbeads.**



The extent and consequences of plastic pollution in the marine environment is difficult to quantify, but it has become a **very serious environmental issue that threatens the marine ecosystems.**

Birds and fish eat larger plastic objects, which can cause blockage of the gastrointestinal tract and severe starvation.

Other vertebrates become entangled in discarded netting from fishing and six packs.



However, researchers are starting to discover the effects of **microplastics** in marine fauna and **humans.**

Microplastics are entering the food chain, and marine species are eating these small particles. Researchers have found health effects on different species, including **tissue damage**, problems with food absorption, and release of toxic chemicals.



Microplastics are present in shellfish cultured for human consumption. So yes, we might also be eating microplastics — **up to 11,000 pieces of a year**, according to a study in *Environmental Pollution*.

Removing all plastic waste from the oceans is an **impossible task**. The first action is to reduce the impact of plastic pollution on marine fauna by **avoiding the production and entrance of plastics into the ocean.**



It is important for us as society to be aware of the problem, **find alternatives to excessive packaging and products containing microbeads**, safely deposit our plastic rubbish and make more informed choices as consumers.

References

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